

Military Establishments—Fires and Thefts

the procedure provided by the Inquiries Act, and it is for that reason that I propose to present this motion. I ask the Minister of National Defence, in his own interest from the point of view of avoiding constant requests of other kinds, and also all members as representatives of the people of Canada, to indicate their desire that this subject be dealt with by a judicial inquiry. Now that we learn that the inquiry, which is not really an inquiry as that term is ordinarily used, is nothing more than an office accounting procedure because of the absence of Colonel Currie in England—that absence in itself indicates an extended delay before any satisfactory answers can be given to this house and to the people of Canada—I am proposing that a judicial inquiry at the very highest level, such as has brought about great reforms in the past, should be instituted to deal with something which now relates to the whole subject matter, not only of accounting but of the national defence of this country.

With a department which is going to spend in this year alone such fabulous sums as those before us, with a department which is responsible for preparing the defence of Canada and our common participation under the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, we should be assured of an administrative system, of an internal organization and of supervision of accounting which will guarantee that we have in this country as efficient and as effective an organization dealing with that vitally important matter as can possibly be made available. Therefore I move, seconded by the hon. member for Peel (Mr. Graydon):

That all the words after "that" to the end of the question be deleted and the following substituted therefor:

"the government should consider the advisability of undertaking a judicial inquiry into the organization of the Department of National Defence and without restricting the generality of the foregoing, to investigate the accounting, inspection and administrative supervision of public property by the Department of National Defence with particular reference to losses of property by theft, looting and fire; the nature of supervision over the army stores and as to whether there has occurred any dereliction of duty on the part of any of the personnel of the said department whose duty it is to safeguard the public property of Canada.

The judicial body thus appointed to have all the powers of a royal commission under part I of the Inquiries Act, chapter 99, of the Revised Statutes of Canada, 1927, to make findings and recommendations and to report the same to parliament."

Hon. Brooke Claxton (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew) has based his appeal to this house to adopt this motion on charges of "wholesale looting" in the Department of National Defence. He has made this charge

before. He made it first on April 21 when he moved the adjournment of the house to discuss a matter of urgent public importance. He repeated it when he spoke for the first time on this subject on May 1. He repeated it in a broadcast of the program "The Nation's Business" over the trans-Canada network on May 6.

This charge is a serious charge. So far as I can learn from the speech of the leader of the opposition this afternoon it is based on thefts at Petawawa, Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax and in British Columbia. He seemed to derive some comfort and support from the fact that Colonel Ross directed a letter to the staff subordinate to him urging a more careful supervision. Why, this letter was the right kind of letter for an officer in command of men to write. That kind of letter has been sent through the years every time there is occasion. This is the kind of action that should be taken by commanding officers and in so far as anything that is brought to my attention is concerned, I see that it is taken.

I do not suggest that the leader of the opposition has said this, but the implication of these wholesale charges of wholesale looting is that great quantities of stores, out of all proportion to the value of the stores concerned, are being removed wholesale from the warehouses, storerooms and depots of the Department of National Defence and the armed forces. He himself used a figure of over \$7 million as the amount of loss through theft and fire. That would be a very large figure but that is not in accordance with the facts before the defence expenditures committee. I will come to that in a minute.

What are we concerned with in the Department of National Defence and the three forces? We are concerned with an operation involving real estate valued at something over a billion and a half dollars, with equipment, supplies and stores having a value of perhaps another billion dollars, quite apart from ships and aircraft.

Mr. Diefenbaker: What did the minister mean by "real estate"? Does he mean the purchase of land, and so on?

Mr. Claxton: Buildings and land, but the land we occupy is not nearly as valuable as the buildings.

Mr. Diefenbaker: The minister mentioned a billion and a half for real estate.

Mr. Claxton: A billion and a half for real estate and something approaching a billion dollars for stores, equipment, and the like. I have made as careful comparisons as I can on the basis of the information available on the subject of fire losses. As I said in